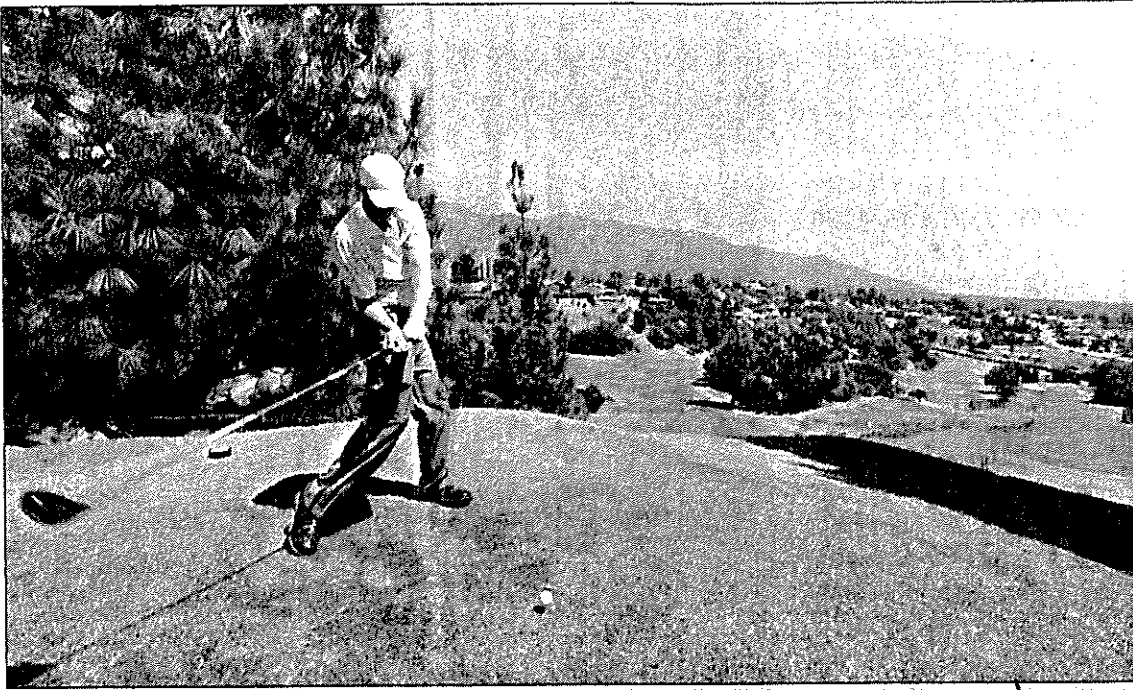


Michael Sabo of Glendale drives the ball at the La Cañada Flintridge Country Club on Wednesday. Golf courses have been impacted by the nation's economic downturn and have made changes to keep players coming back.

Walt Mancini
Staff Photographer



Caught in the rough

Golf courses feeling the impact of economic slowdown

By Kevin Smith Staff Writer

The nation's economic downturn has taken a heavy toll on businesses in a variety of sectors, and golf courses are no exception.

From municipal properties to privately owned facilities, golf courses have had to tweak their operations to get players onto the greens.

"We've been impacted pretty dramatically," said Doug Colliflower, general manager of both the Altadena Golf Course and the Eaton Canyon Golf Course in Pasadena. "It's kind of a combination of things. The industry was way overbuilt into the '90s and that came home to roost right around 9-11."

Many were afraid to board a plane after the terrorist attacks, he said, and that impacted the resort business.

"We've been losing rounds steadily," Colliflower said. "There were 46,700 rounds played at the Altadena course last year. In 2004 it was 61,000-plus rounds, in 2002 it was 68,500 and in 2001 it was 71,700 rounds. I know a lot of private clubs have reduced their membership fees dramatically."

The La Cañada Flintridge Country Club is among them. The club slashed its membership fee from about \$12,000 five years ago to its current rate of \$4,000.

"That's where most clubs have made the biggest adjustment to the economy," said Rick Adams, the club's general manager.

Private clubs have sought to recoup some of those losses by hiking their monthly dues.

"It's not unusual for a private club to raise its monthly dues about 5 percent once a year," Adams said. "Most of the private clubs have done that because operating costs continue to rise. The impacts of higher fuel costs are driving up the price of food and golf course maintenance."

Despite the tough economy, the La Cañada Flintridge club opted to move forward with needed projects.

"Contractors are more aggressive with their pricing, so we did an \$800,000 renovation to our dining room, which helps us better serve our members who are hosting wedding parties and other special events," Adams said.

That project, he said, would likely have cost about 15 percent more in better economic times.

The club also completed construction of a \$400,000 enclosed practice park with artificial turf where players can warm up before hitting the greens.

Adams said members have become more selective in what they are willing to

buy from the pro shop — another sign of the changing economy.

David Sams, director of golf operations at the Brookside Golf Course in Pasadena, said business there is down about 20 percent from its peak year in 2007. But he sought to put things in perspective.

"We're still doing about as good as any course in the country," he said. "We generate about \$2.5 million a year off the course."

Brookside is a municipal course that operates as an arm of Rose Bowl Operating Co. Day-to-day operations at the course are handled by American Golf Corp. in Santa Monica, which operates about 90 courses throughout the country.

At its peak in 2007, 146,000 rounds of golf were played at Brookside. Last year that fell to 131,000 rounds. But this year the course has seen an uptick of 11 to 12 percent, Sams said.

"We had some improvement projects scheduled when we started going into the downturn, so we went ahead with them," he said. "We've spent over \$1 million on the property since 2008. It's money we had in the bank. We're always operating in the black."

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John Paton named new CEO of Media

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